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# Plymouth



Debee Tlumacki/The Patriot Ledger

Native Americans gather at the statue of Massasoit on Cole's Hill in Plymouth yesterday for their Day of Mourning march.

# No clashes as Indians stage march in Plymouth

By Tamara Race  
The Patriot Ledger

PLYMOUTH — Peace prevailed yesterday on the same streets where violence reigned last year, but there was plenty of angry rhetoric.

Town officials' worst fears were laid to rest as Pilgrims Progress re-enactors and Native Americans and their supporters walked through downtown side streets in separate events without incident.

Some credited the cold, rainy weather for the relative calm. Others said it was the town's recent settlement with Indian protesters. Still others said the reduced police visibility prevented a repeat of last year's clash with officers during which 25 United American Indians of New England and their supporters were arrested.

In conjunction with prosecutors dropping various charges of unlawful assembly, disorderly conduct, and assault and battery on police officers lodged against the protesters last year, town officials negotiated a settlement that included a \$135,000 payment to the Native American group, an agreement to allow a march without a permit with prior notice of a route, and help in securing a site for a potluck supper.

Per that agreement, nearly 1,000 Native Americans and their supporters gathered for Day of Mourning ceremonies on Cole's Hill yesterday and then walked through downtown Plymouth.

Organizers shortened the march because of inclement weather and gave up their traditional rally at Plymouth Rock to seek shelter in Memorial Hall, where they met for their potluck social.

"It was a very, very powerful day," said United American Indians co-leader Moonanum James. "I think a lot of people who didn't think we could do this — people who call us criminals or terrorists — found out that what happened last year wouldn't have happened if we were allowed to finish our march.

"Without sitting down across the table from Plymouth (officials), today wouldn't have happened."

Yesterday's events began at 10 a.m. with the traditional Pilgrims Progress march, a re-enactment of the walk from the waterfront to Burial Hill made by 51 Pilgrims to honor those who had died during the colony's first harsh winter.

With muskets and Bibles in hand, the walkers were accompanied by family members, friends and tourists as



# Thanksgiving peaceful

## ■ PLYMOUTH

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they made their way down Water Street, up Leyden and Church streets to the historic cemetery.

Walkers passed the Native American group at Massasoit's statue on Cole's Hill.

The two groups have clashed in the past, but yesterday they ignored each other, although Native American leaders privately denounced the Pilgrim event.

"If they would get rid of the Bibles and muskets, I'd have no problem with them," James said. "Together those items are a symbol of oppression. I don't object to their procession to the burial ground to honor their dead relatives, but the muskets and Bibles say 'you believe as we do, or we'll kill you.' That's what they told my ancestors.

"We object to any procession that glorifies the Pilgrim myth. Why should people be reminded of a dark period in history?"

James, a Wampanoag, and other Native Americans depict Thanksgiving as a Day of Mourning for the abuses their ancestors suffered at the hands of European settlers.

The Cole's Hill observances began 28 years ago when Pilgrim Society officials suppressed a speech prepared for the 350th anniversary of the Pilgrims' arrival by guest speaker Wamsutta Frank James, Moonanum's father.

The speech offered a Native American Thanksgiving perspective drastically different from that of white society. Frank James refused to alter his views to please Pilgrim Society members.

Over the last 10 years, United American Indians of New England has expanded beyond Native American people to include gay and lesbian rights advocates, union activists and other radical activists, all of whom were heard from yesterday.

No police were in sight as Native American elder Sam Sapiel opened Day of Mourning events with a traditional prayer.

James explained the town's settlement agreement and rejoiced in

their right to march without a permit.

"It's the first time since 1620 that Pilgrims have been forced to stop taking and start giving back to native people," James said. "I won't recount last year's events. It was just one more incident in the long history of our mistreatment at the hands of European invaders.

"We give no thanks for the invasion, no thanks for the massacre and no thanks for the theft of our lands. We will stop marching when merchants stop making millions off the blood of our ancestors, when corporations stop polluting Mother Earth, when racism is eradicated, when the homeless have homes, when children don't go to bed hungry at night, and when police brutality no longer exists in communities of color."

Speakers lined up at the microphone to rally for such causes as freedom for Leonard Peltier, a Native American convicted of killing two FBI agents at Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota in 1975, and Mumia Abu-jamal, a black journalist on death row in Pennsylvania for killing a Philadelphia police officer.

As the weather deteriorated, the program was cut short to begin the march through town.

"The marchers are doing it the way they should, with banners and numbers," former Plymouth resident Bill McDonald said from spot on Leyden Street.

McDonald was also in town for the holiday last year.

"I think the police overreacted a little last year," he said. "They seem better prepared and more in control this year."

Lloyd Thimas, who was born and raised in Plymouth, had no problem with the demonstration.

"It's nice to be able to march," he said. "Look at them. They're not hurting anyone. We can have the Thanksgiving Day parade, why can't we have this? I'm all for it."

But Thimas' boss, Richard Petti, was less agreeable.

"Of course they're peaceful, they were paid off," he said. "Selectmen should never have given in."